Landlords with delinquent city of Erie garbage accounts who want to be part of the federal Section 8 housing assistance program are paying up.

John Horan, the Erie Housing Authority's executive director, said a new authority policy requiring all landlords who participate in the Section 8 program to be current on all local taxes and fees, including refuse bills, has prompted Section 8 landlords to pay more than $22,000 in delinquent bills to Erie Water Works since January. Erie Water Works collects water, sewer and refuse bills on the city's behalf.

The policy took effect in April and was explained to Erie City Council at the panel's June 4 Finance Committee meeting. The Housing Authority's move came as city government continues to look for ways to collect $2.15 million in delinquent garbage fees owed to the city. Many of the largest delinquent accounts belong to landlords, and several of them own multiple properties. City officials have been criticized by many residents for not being aggressive enough over the years in collecting overdue garbage bills, especially since residents' garbage fees were increased in the city's 2014 budget. "Our policy has definitely had an impact," Horan said. "I think that is a real good result, and I expect that by next spring, we will have these things down to zero, or close to it."

Section 8 is a federal program that provides rent subsidies to eligible low-income people and families and is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. People who qualify pay a set portion of their rent, and the federal government covers the rest. The Housing Authority administers the program within the city limits, and there are about 900 Section 8 housing units citywide owned by roughly 400 landlords who participate in the program, according to Horan.

Erie Water Works in January provided information to the Housing Authority that indicated the owners of 122 Section 8 properties owed a collective $55,752 in delinquent refuse bills, Horan said. After the Housing Authority changed its Section 8 policy and notified landlords, many of them started paying their delinquent bills, Horan said. Currently, the owners of 41 Section 8 properties owe a collective $33,577, which means the Section 8 garbage delinquencies have been reduced by $22,175 since January.

Horan added that more than $11,000 in delinquent refuse bills have been paid since June 6, when the Erie Times-News first reported on the policy change. At that time, there were 54 delinquent Section 8 accounts totaling $44,871, which means the Section 8 delinquencies have dropped by $11,294 since early June. Paul Vojtek, chief executive of Erie Water Works, applauded the Housing Authority's policy change. "That is good news," Vojtek said. "I think these are the kinds of things that are going to make a big difference down the road."